

Christ, the Man - #1

Text: John 2: 1-11

There are certain basic concepts on which our Christian beliefs are founded. These are the fundamentals of all religious thinking; they are the doctrines of the church. The importance of church doctrine, and of clear-cut individual comprehension of that doctrine can be measured by the statement of Jesus, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." A man's thinking determines his living. In the past few weeks we have discussed rather briefly certain all-important doctrines concerning God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. There yet remain the great doctrines concerning God the Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And bound up closely with these are the kindred doctrines of man and his relationship to God, such doctrines as salvation by faith, and atonement through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The starting point for any study of the living Christ may well be found in the fourth gospel from which our text is taken. The gospel of John was written with one purpose: to settle the arguments and determine the truth concerning the person and work of Christ. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels and were written shortly after the death of the Lord, but John was written some thirty years later. By that time there had arisen much controversy over the exact nature of Jesus. People were asking, "Who is this Jesus of whom you speak?" "Is he indeed God in the flesh? That sounds of blasphemy. Isn't it true that the Jews prove him only the son of a poor carpenter of Nazareth? Isn't he more likely to be not God, but just a great prophet who has revealed God as he ~~was never been~~ revealed before?" Such must have been the questions asked, and the common confusion of thought which made it necessary for John to set

forth his great treatise, proving conclusively what he had seen with his eyes and heard with his ears from the lips of the Master himself: that Jesus was both God and man. John declares the humanity and divinity of Christ--the cornerstone doctrine of Christian faith. Here in the first miracle recorded by John we see Christ's humanity emphasized, but throughout the rest of the book the divinity of Jesus is the dominant theme. Jesus, the son of the carpenter, is the only begotten Son of God.

It may seem strange that of the seven miracles recorded in John, only two--the feeding of the 5000 and the walking on the water--are found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. But it is no longer strange when we remember that John wrote with this primary purpose before him, the purpose of explaining Christ's nature and mission. We would naturally expect him, therefore, to choose only those miracles which most clearly show forth the Lord. Thus it is that in these seven miracles of John we have a comprehensive, though of course incomplete, survey of Christian faith and theology. A study of the miracles of John gives us a bird's-eye-view, as it were, of the doctrines concerning the Christ.

This morning we shall consider only the first miracle. It shows forth Christ the Man. This is the miracle of the turning of the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. But first, let us run briefly through the other miracles that we may have a better understanding of the whole picture. We shall consider these more fully in the course of the next few weeks. The second miracle, the healing of the nobleman's son gives a picture of Christ the Manifestator, the revealer of knowledge. The third, the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, shows Christ the Master. The feeding of the 5,000 teaches that Christ is the Manna, the Bread of Life. When Christ healed the man born blind he declared himself the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the seventh miracle,

the raising of Lazarus, we see Christ the Maker and Creator; he is one with God the Father. These seven miracles furnish us a short sketch, a skeleton outline of the character of Christ.

Let me read again of this first miracle that Jesus performed on earth, the turning of the water to wine at the marriage feast at Cana.

And Jesus was called to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith to him, They have no wine. Jesus saith, Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith to the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. Jesus saith to them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them to the brim. And he saith, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine he called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee...

--John 2: 1-11

It was from this text that my old professor of Rhetoric and Logic used to preach a powerful temperance sermon. But this is not the time for that. Far stronger than any words of mine is the memory of the recent brutal murder in Wolford which portrays all too vividly the sad, grim tragedy of the liquor traffic. The American tragedy of today is the tragedy of her drunken youth. May we point out here that the Greek word oinos, here translated wine, is believed by many scholars to refer to the unfermented, not fermented juice of the grape.

This text has also been used as the basis for mighty sermons on miracles, but we shall not speak on that subject now. Suffice it to say that I believe in miracles, that I have always believed in miracles because I have always believed that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Doubt one part of it, and you doubt it all, for then it has lost its power in your life as the rock-basis of all belief. And I believe in miracles because I believe in an Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, who is abundantly able to perform all manner of wonders according to his good pleasure. It would be strange indeed if the Omnipotent God who every year turns the

water of the rain into the red wine of the grape, could not on this occasion hasten the process and turn the six pots of water into wine for the marriage feast.

[But I want to speak neither on temperance nor on miracles this morning.] I want to point out the two great lessons of this text. First, this miracle, the turning of the water into wine at the marriage feast, shows Christ the Man; it emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. And secondly, it teaches that God sanctions the social relationships of man.

The first lesson of the miracle concerns the humanity of Christ as portrayed at the marriage feast. [When we say that here in this passage the Bible record shows us Christ the Man,] we must remember that no one of these miracles of John's gospel is a complete picture in itself. The seven miracles are like pieces of a mosaic, not wholly intelligible alone, but when fitted together with the other pieces forming a perfect and beautiful work of art, a complete picture. Christ's humanity is only a part of the picture of Jesus the Lord. We must study this miracle in its relationship to the other six to find the complete picture of Christ.

Too many people put on their glasses and get so close to the mosaic that they can see only this part--the humanity of Christ. How many times have you heard or read items like this: "Christ was the best, the most nearly perfect man that ever lived. He was the great Teacher, the perfect moralist, and ranks with Confucius, Buddha and Mohammed as the greatest thinker the world has ever produced." You'll hear a great deal of talk like that. Vague concepts of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God are far more popular doctrines today than the Deity of Christ.

A friend of mine attended one of our great Eastern universities. In a course on philosophy he sat under a professor who had the reputation of

being a Christian thinker, although rather liberal. One day a student asked, "What would you say was the difference between Christ and Socrates?" The professor thought a moment, then replied, "Christ and Socrates were both great teachers and great men. They both taught by word of mouth, and left the writing down of their teachings to their disciples. They both claimed supernatural guidance--Socrates had his daimon, and Jesus his heavenly father. Both Christ and Socrates were misunderstood by the people they sought to help. Both were brought to trial. Both were condemned on false charges. Both were put to death. But gentlemen, this is the difference between Jesus Christ and Socrates: Socrates died an old man; his work was done; but Christ died in the very flower of youth. Who knows what achievements lay before him?" There he stopped. Not a word about Jesus' unique message of salvation; not a word about his glorious resurrection; not a word about the Christ who lives again, sitting in the heavenlies at the right hand of God the Father. To that professor, Christ was just another great intellect tragically martyred at thirty-three!

That kind of thinking is so wide-spread today that it is very easy for us, in combatting it, to swing too far the other way. It is very easy to insist so strongly upon the Deity of Christ that we forget the importance of his humanity. Jesus at the marriage feast of Cana is a man, human in his reactions to the situation. He is ready to sympathize with the host when the wine runs embarrassingly low; he is quick to take steps to remedy the lack; he is willing to share in all the joys of the celebration.

The miracle was accomplished with no blaring of trumpets, with none of the trappings of an act of divine majesty. It was done simply and naturally, as one man does a kind deed for a friend. Jesus is acting as a man for men. As he calls himself in the preceding passage, he is the Son of Man.

How different he was from John the Baptist, John the lover of waste-places and the solitude of the desert. John dwelt apart, but Jesus was a lover of men. All his days he dwelt among them in the crowded cities sharing their joys and their sorrows as a brother and a friend. We read elsewhere that he suffered as a man, that he was even tempted as a man. How much closer this humanity of Jesus brings us to God. He is no longer a mighty force, an awe-inspiring, fearful, personless power, far, far off with no understanding of or fellowship with man. Now he is God the Father, a God who loves his children. We can call him Father reverently because in love he made his son one with us. God became man in the person of Jesus Christ for our sakes--to save you and to save me.

That is the doctrine of the first miracle. And if, as we said above, doctrine moulds man's living, this doctrine of the humanity of Jesus should in some way affect the life of the Christian. What is this effect? What has the miracle of the turning of the water into wine to do with the way we live in the twentieth century?

The answer is the second lesson of the miracle. Applied to life, the doctrine of the humanity of Jesus and the example given us of Jesus at the marriage feast shows that the Christian has a perfect right to times of wholesome good fellowship with others. The miracle places God's mark of approval on man's social relationships. It reveals Christianity as a religion of joy. Far different this is from some of the Hindu creeds which teach that the more a man suffers the holier he becomes. My brother writes from India of the famed Holy Men, or Fakirs, there: men who sit baking in the hot tropical sun day after day, men who stretch themselves out on beds of nails, or hang themselves head downwards from gateways, or bury themselves underground,--all this in the name of holiness! The Christian has no use for self-punishment. The Bible tells him to "Rejoice evermore"

and again, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad."

Inner righteousness will preclude and shallow surface piety. A long-drawn face is no proof of a pure heart. The sad and sanctimonious have been well ridiculed in the story of the little girl who was not allowed to smile on Sundays. Her zealous parents would lecture her on the evils of frivolity and the severity and solemnity of righteousness and religion. On those great days when the minister called she must sit primly in a corner with her hands folded and utter no sound, but meditate on the conversation of her betters. One day she came bounding into the room with the startling announcement that she had just seen a real Christian donkey out in the street. Pressed to give a reason for her knowledge of the beast's religious convictions, she exclaimed, "Oh I know it's a Christian, and a good one--it has such a long face." "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings-----" There are those who do judge Christians by the sobriety of their conduct, and we are certainly not advocating riotous living, but the length of the face is not a good criterion of the righteousness of the heart. The Christian has something to smile about!

Here in the first of the miracles John records for us we see Jesus attending the marriage feast as a man enjoying the fellowship of the merry-makers. He does not frown on mirth. He had come that all might have joy, and that their joy might be full. In this the first sign of his active ministry, Jesus is teaching that Christianity is social. Don't confuse this with that modern side-issue, the Social Gospel. He is teaching only that Christianity is not self-centered and selfish. It strikes at the individual, of course, but reaches farther. No man lives to himself alone. As Aristotle wrote, "Man is a social creature." We can recognize this, and accept God's sanction of our social interests, but let us govern our

associations with that good advice from the Book of Proverbs: (Prov. 13:20)

He that walketh with wise men is wise,  
But the companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Yes, man is a social creature. He cannot exclude himself from the society of others and remain normal. But it is well to remember that the bonds of fellowship that link him to his fellow-creatures should be bonds of Christian fellowship.

To summarize the two great lessons of the first miracle: Jesus, the Son of God, became man that we might obtain the Christian joy of salvation. He had to put on humanity as a garment that he might bear the sins of man on the cross of Calvary. Before we could be saved, before the joys of salvation were open to us, the righteousness of God had to be vindicated. Christ must take our guilt upon him. He must wash away our sins with his own blood. He must justify us by his own righteousness imputed to us.

These are the central, the most vital doctrines of Christianity, and they have no meaning if Christ were not Man. He could not suffer on the cross if he were not man. He could not be guilty with all the guilt of the human race if he were not man. This is the story of the first miracle: Christ the Man. It was as a man he died for us; but remember, it was as very God that he rose again!